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LA County Settlement Major Step in Ending the Jail-to-Homelessness Cycle

LOS ANGELES, CA— The County of Los Angeles announced yesterday that it would adopt a robust policy to assist people with mental disabilities in transitioning from jail to the community and to aid them in accessing essential services. The new approach was announced through a settlement agreement with a group of disabled and homeless former inmates of Los Angeles County jails represented by Public Counsel and Munger, Tolles & Olson.

Under this settlement, Los Angeles County is adopting an approach to its treatment of persons with mental disabilities that promises to make important steps in reducing recidivism. By engaging in a proactive release planning process that addresses the housing, medical care, employment, benefits, and social needs of individuals with mental illness and by promoting relationships with community-based providers, the settlement provisions will make it easier for individuals with mental illness to reenter civil society and reduce the likelihood of homelessness and recidivism.

"The new policy will give individuals with mental disabilities essential support that will help them reenter society and access the services that they need," said **Alisa Hartz of Public Counsel**. "Los Angeles County is taking important and progressive steps toward ensuring that mentally disabled people are not released from jail onto our streets. This is a critical advance in the battle against the cycle of homelessness and incarceration in Los Angeles."

"Los Angeles County worked collaboratively with Public Counsel, Munger, Tolles & Olson, and the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that inmates with mental illness have the resources they need to succeed and stay healthy after leaving jail and returning to the community," said **Los Angeles County Counsel Mary C. Wickham**. "This resolution provides an excellent framework for the County to support people leaving institutions with comprehensive and compassionate release planning. Helping people rebuild their lives after incarceration is a key priority for the County. These expanded guidelines give us new tools to help people with mental illness get the support they need to successfully re-enter the community."

Specific highlights of the new policy include the following:

- Involvement of Community-Based Providers: Release plans can be developed with the participation of the community-based providers who will be involved in providing services to the individual after their release from jail. In preparation for release, jail staff will notify any community-based providers of the release date to facilitate continuity of care.
- Medications and Treatment: In preparation for release, release planners will schedule the individual's next mental health appointment with a community-based physician. Individuals taking psychotropic medications will be released with a 14-day supply of medication, unless contraindicated, or the medication and prescription sufficient to see a doctor and get a new supply.
- Identification Cards: Lack of identification is often a barrier to receiving services upon release from jail. Under the new policy, individuals lacking California identification will be referred for assistance in getting replacement identification.
- Benefits Assistance: Individuals with mental illness who also identify as homeless will get help in restarting suspended Social Security benefits or applying for new benefits, thereby reducing their need for General Relief benefits.
- Transportation: For those individuals who are unable to arrange their own transportation because of their mental illness, release planners will arrange or help arrange transportation from the jail to a location identified in the release plan.

Under the new settlement, release planning for individuals with mental illness will start from the first clinical assessment and be updated throughout the period of incarceration. "Discharge planning is a critical step for incarcerated individuals with mental illness," said Bradley Phillips of **Munger, Tolles & Olson**, a frequent pro bono partner with Public Counsel. "A settlement like this demonstrates that the community can and should work together to provide adequate services for all residents. Real changes can be made to combat the jail-to-homelessness cycle."

For more information on *United States of America vs. County of Los Angeles and Sheriff Jim McDonnell* and to view the case history in full, [please visit this page](#).

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